

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
March 28, 2002

Contact: Mark Weber
Phone: (301) 443-8956
MWEBER@SAMHSA.GOV

SAMHSA Puts Knowledge about Underage Drinking to Work in Classrooms Nationwide

Just in time for April's Alcohol Awareness Month, every fifth-grade public school teacher in the country will have new tools to help stop underage drinking before it starts. In a unique collaboration between the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and Scholastic, Inc., classroom teachers nationwide will receive a two-part set of underage drinking-related materials designed especially for use by fifth-grade students, their families, and their teachers.

The materials include *Reach Out Now: Talk with Your Fifth Graders about Underage Drinking*, a four-page set of lessons and in-class activities for teachers to use as part of classroom instruction. Also included is a take-home packet for students and their parents: *Talk with Your Fifth Grader about Underage Drinking*. The materials are based on research supported by NIH's National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism (NIAAA) and programs funded by SAMHSA's Center for Substance Abuse Prevention (CSAP).

SAMHSA's National Household Survey on Drug Abuse suggests that fifth grade – ages 10 to 11 – is not too early to begin sending clear messages about underage drinking. Almost 10.5 million youth ages 12-20 – nearly 30 percent – had used alcohol at least once in month prior to the survey. The average age of first use continues to drop. A survey of sixth grade students found that over half said it would be easy for someone their age to get alcohol at a party; a more recent national survey reported that 72 percent of eighth graders said alcohol was “fairly easy” or “very easy” to get.

“Our message that underage drinking is unacceptable and illegal needs to reach down to elementary and middle school students, teachers and their families,” Health and Human Services Secretary Tommy G. Thompson said. “The benefits of discussion stimulated by the *Reach Out Now* materials can last a lifetime. What better time to begin that dialogue than in April – Alcohol Awareness Month?”

“The good news is that 60% of young people age 12-17 have never had a drink. What parents and teachers may not realize is that their disapproval of underage drinking has been identified as one of the key reasons children choose *not* to drink,” said SAMHSA Administrator Charles G. Curie. “Six simple actions can help children make smart decisions about the use of alcohol; *Reach Out Now* gives parents and teachers those tools.”

- more -

- 2 -

The *Reach Out Now* materials have been received enthusiastically by the Leadership to Keep

Children Alcohol Free, a consortium of Governors' spouses from states across the country, who are helping to raise awareness and use of the materials. Additional information about the Leadership to Keep Children Alcohol Free and their underage drinking prevention activities for children ages 9-15 are available at www.alcoholfreechildren.org.

The Leadership to Keep Children Alcohol Free is supported not only by NIAAA and SAMHSA, but also by The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, NIH's Office of Research on Women's Health and National Center on Minority Health and Health Disparities, and the Departments of Justice and Transportation.

The Department of Education's Safe and Drug-Free Schools program also has announced the availability of the materials for use in their school-based programs as well.

Reach Out Now: Talk with Your Fifth Grader about Underage Drinking includes lessons and in-class activities focusing on increasing fifth graders' knowledge about alcohol and its effects on the developing child, ways to make healthy decisions about drinking, and alternative activities to underage drinking. Teachers are shown how to incorporate the materials into classroom curricula in English, social studies, and science.

The take-home packet for students and their parents gives families concrete, health promoting activities that can help a child reject underage drinking. It provides six key actions parents can take to help children make wise decisions: keeping good lines of communication; getting involved in your children's lives; making and enforcing clear and consistent rules; serving as a positive role model; helping your children know how to choose friends wisely; and being aware of their activities.

This public/private partnership allows SAMHSA to merge its knowledge about underage drinking prevention with Scholastic, Inc.'s reputation for excellence in the development of classroom materials to help bring this important message about alcohol to America's youth.

SAMHSA, a public health agency within the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, is the lead federal agency for improving the quality and availability of substance abuse prevention, addiction treatment and mental health services in the United States. Information on SAMHSA's programs is available on the Internet at www.samhsa.gov. New media requests should be directed to Media Services at (800) 487-4890.

The National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism, a component of the National Institutes of Health, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, conducts and supports approximately 90 percent of U.S. research on the causes, consequences, prevention, and treatment of alcohol abuse, alcoholism, and alcohol problems and disseminates research findings to science, practitioner, policy making, and general audiences. NIAAA publications are available at www.niaaa.nih.gov.

###

Sign up for SAMHSA's mailing list for upcoming information at www.samhsa.gov.